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ABSTRACT

In its nine chapters, this summary provides a preview of Connecticut's forthcoming "A Guide to Program Development for Kindergarten, Part 1." Chapter 1 reviews historical antecedents, including Froebel's influence, kindergarten in the United States before 1900, European influences in the early 20th century, American influences, the kindergarten debate, and recent history. Chapter 2 discusses maturationist, behaviorist, and interactionist theoretical models and their influence on kindergarten programing, as well as the developmental stages and diverse understandings of kindergarten children which teachers must take into account. Chapter 3 offers guiding principles for a high quality kindergarten, including a list of the teacher's roles and related competencies and strategies. Chapter 4 describes kindergarten children's emotional and social development. Particular attention is given to sources of stress on kindergarten children and ways to handle stressed children. Chapter 5 describes the integrated curriculum, activity centers, unification of learning through a theme, interactive learning, contributions of play to growth, curriculum areas, and teaching of thinking skills. Chapter 6 focuses on the organization of the kindergarten. Chapter 7 describes ways of building a home-school-community partnership. Chapter 8 discusses the child's transition from preschool to kindergarten. Chapter 9 deals with program planning and evaluation. (RH)

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A GUIDE TO PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FOR KINDERGARTEN

PART I

A PREVIEW

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A GUIDE TO PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FOR KINDERGARTEN

PART I

A PREVIEW

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This condensation of *A Guide to Program Development for Kindergarten, Part I* was prepared by Velma A. Adams.

Preface

This condensed version of *A Guide to Program Development for Kindergarten, Part 1* provides a preview of what the full guide will contain.

Part 1, from which these excerpts are taken, examines in detail the philosophy of the kindergarten and the theoretical bases of modern kindergarten programming. The guide provides a wealth of research and documentation, tracing the evolution of early childhood education from the early 18th century to the present, and setting the stage for the development of kindergarten programs to meet the needs of children in the 20th century.

The theme of the guide is that programs must be "developmentally appropriate" to be effective. Learning activities must offer each kindergarten child opportunities to learn and grow, starting at the developmental level at which each child enters the program.

The guide strongly advocates:

- use of play or interactive learning as the best vehicle for encouraging growth and development in young children;
- avoidance of overly structured academic curricula for which children are not developmentally ready;
- need for teachers to be aware of signs of stress in children, often from family or social pressures, and to find ways to alleviate such stress so that it does not inhibit learning; and
- benefits of building a strong cooperative relationship with parents or others serving in a parental role, to facilitate each child's learning and development.

The guide specifically cautions against adding to stress by trying to help children "get ready" for first grade rather than letting the child's knowledge and skills develop naturally as the child matures. It includes a discussion of extended-day and full-day kindergartens.

Part 2, not included in this preview, is made up of curricula in various subject areas, and suggests appropriate activities for integrating the teaching of art, music, languages, mathematics, science, social studies and physical education into the kindergarten day.

The complete two-part document is illustrated by photographs of children participating in learning activities at several of Connecticut's kindergarten programs. Suggested learning activities related to points in the text appear throughout, and extensive references provide direction for further research.

The preview of Part 1 which follows is excerpted from the full text of the guide. In a few instances, the text has been paraphrased or the editor has noted where in the complete text the reader can find a more detailed exposition of the subject.

The specialists in early childhood education who wrote *A Guide to Program Development for Kindergarten* hope that readers of this summary will find it helpful and that, when the complete publication appears later this year, teachers and administrators will use it as a guide to planning, operating and evaluating kindergarten programs in Connecticut's public schools.

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Chapter 1
Historical Perspectives

Today we view childhood as a special time of life and kindergarten as a critical early learning opportunity that should be available to every child. As we plan and implement appropriate kindergarten programs, it is helpful to know how we arrived at our current understanding of the kindergarten child.

Froebel's Influence

The kindergarten was given its truly distinctive character by Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852). The roots of Froebel's kindergarten lie in Aristotle's notions of child development and in the ideas of two other Swiss thinkers, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827). Rousseau emphasized the importance of understanding child development in the context of appropriate child activity and focused on the individual as a lifelong learner. The object of education was not to fill the mind with information but to teach methods of acquiring it when needed. Pestalozzi believed that the child's natural instincts proved the best motivation for learning. The teacher was to guide each child in a natural sequence of development, relying on experiences of the senses and progressing from the concrete to the abstract. For Froebel the growth of a child through successive stages was as real as the growth of plants. Thus he christened his early childhood programs "kindergartens" or gardens of children.

Of the many ideas Froebel conceived, the role of play as a means of enhancing self-development was perhaps the most innovative and most lasting. Previously most educators believed that play had no place in the learning process or in the schools. Froebel also refined Pestalozzi's concrete object lessons. For him, objects provided more than sense impressions; they could also inspire symbolic understanding. A ball, for example, was not just a toy or a sphere but also the physical manifestation of the concept of a unit.

Beginning in the late 1830s, Froebel established schools in Switzerland and Germany, but it was in the United States that his innovative approaches to early childhood education flourished.

Kindergarten in the U.S. before 1900

The first kindergarten in the United States was established in 1856 in Watertown, Wisconsin, by Margarethe Schurz (1834-1879), a student of Froebel. Instruction was in German. The first English-speaking kindergarten, a private school based on an English model, was established in 1860 in Boston, Massachusetts, by Elizabeth Peabody. Kindergarten did not become entrenched, however, until it was incorporated into public education.

The first public kindergarten was established in 1873 in St. Louis, Missouri, by Susan Blow (1843-1916). By 1880 there were at least 400 kindergartens in more than 30 states. They generated considerable controversy between traditional educators who thought the emphasis on play was inappropriate and kindergarten teachers who criticized the academic emphasis.

European Influences in the early 20th century

A significant adaptation in early childhood education occurred as a result of the methods and theories of Maria Montessori (1870-1952), the first female physician in Italy and a noted educator. Montessori believed order and a "prepared environment" were essential for children. Activities related to practical life, emphasizing the care of one's self and the environment. To make these practical lessons easier to accomplish, she created the first classroom furniture built to a child's scale.

The revolutionary theories of psychoanalysis formulated by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) were another influence. Educators became increasingly aware of the affective domain and the need to recognize its influence on learning.

American Influences

The strongest forces for change came from three notable American thinkers, John Dewey (1859-1952), G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) and Edward Lee Thorndike (1874-1949).

Dewey believed that the goal of education was to prepare individuals for life in a democracy. At the University of Chicago, he put into practice his "learning by doing" theories. Children planned, prepared and served their own lunch and participated in planning, organizing and evaluating their learning experiences. The environment was informal.

Hall was among the first scientifically--rather than philosophically--oriented psychologists. One of his significant formulations was the notion of catharsis, of letting children express emotions and behaviors, including negative ones such as fighting, as a natural part of development.

From early experimental studies in animal learning, Thorndike developed the theory that the primary means of learning is trial and error. To facilitate learning, educators must reduce errors by connecting a stimulus with the correct response.

The kindergarten debate

While Susan Blow and her followers remained staunchly wedded to the Froebelian model, others began to question and dissent. Patty Smith Hill (1868-1946) struck the strongest blow and was most instrumental in the evolution of a uniquely American kindergarten. Hill retained the games, songs and activities of Froebel's kindergarten but argued that children should have freedom to adapt materials and activities according to their own interests and developmental levels. Her activities for children included a "housekeeping corner" and field trips, and she invented the "unit blocks" which are still is use today. As her kindergarten evolved, Hill developed a "conduct curriculum" that stressed behavioral objectives.

Recent history

During the 1920s and 1930s kindergarten was influenced by the work of Arnold Gesell (1880-1961). Trained in both psychology and medicine, Gesell founded the Yale Clinic of Child Development at Yale University in 1911. His research led many educators to emphasize the first years of life as critically important. When he retired, his colleagues, Drs. Frances Ilg and Louise Bates Ames, left Yale and founded the Gesell Institute of Child Development (now Human Development) to carry on his work.

From 1920 to 1940 the kindergarten movement waxed and waned. During World War II many American women began working outside the home and numerous child-care centers were opened to provide care for workers' children. After the war, many of them closed.

During the postwar "baby boom" era, programming was not subjected to much scrutiny or change. In 1965 compensatory education for young children was initiated through the Head Start program. Also very influential during this period was the work of Piaget, whose theory of cognitive development has been adapted for practical application in the classroom. While originally trained as a biologist, Piaget became interested in children's reasoning; by the time he was 25, he was dedicated to studying how children think. Through wide experimentation and interviewing of children, he organized cognitive development into four states: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. To insure optimal learning, according to Piaget's theory, learning environment and activities should be related to the child's state of cognitive development. In kindergarten, this means opportunities for hands-on, concrete experiences, and chances to solve real and relevant problems, to handle lots of materials, and to learn by doing.

Despite disagreements about the different theories of early childhood education, three themes can be traced throughout its history:

- the importance and uniqueness of childhood and the need for adults to take responsibility for setting the stage for the child's later development;
- education as a means of achieving positive social change; and
- education as a vehicle for the transmission of social, cultural and moral values.

Inherent also in recent educational practices are recognition of the cultural heritage and appreciation of various ethnic backgrounds, as well as the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society.

Because debates about education are really debates about a society's basic values, educational programming is both important and difficult.

Chapter 2
Theoretical Models and Child Development

The numerous decisions and choices involved in developing a kindergarten program should be consistent with what the school system believes about the learning process and the nature of young children. Program planners should depend more upon information generated by research and upon advice offered by early childhood education leaders than upon the influence of textbook publishers or public opinion.

The principle that education should be based on children's developmental characteristics is well accepted, although disagreements exist concerning the precise characteristics that will be manifest at various ages. Opinions about **how** children learn are more controversial. Early childhood educators generally favor interactional learning and view child development--physical, intellectual and social-emotional--as a complex process that cannot be described in simple chronological terms.

Theoretical models

Theories about how children learn can be categorized into three general models: maturationist, behaviorist and interactionist. Each holds different tenets about learning and has specific implications for practice, and each of the three has made a significant mark on education.

Maturationist. This theory holds that knowledge exists within the child, whose innate capacities unfold according to genetically programmed patterns of behavior. Maturationists believe that much that we come to know--concepts of time, space, language and mathematics--emerge in successive stages as the body matures in a nurturing environment. Specific information, e.g., vocabulary in a particular language, is acquired from the environment but only when maturation creates a readiness for such knowledge. In this model the aim of schooling is to provide an optimum environment in which individual learning will happen naturally. In kindergarten, this means within the context of play. Formal instruction is avoided and few demands are placed on the child. The teacher is primarily an observer, watching for signs that the child is ready for formal teaching. In block building, for example, the teacher refrains from interfering with the building.

Behaviorist. According to behaviorists, knowledge exists outside the child and is acquired piece by piece. Progressive changes in behavior can be observed as the child responds to stimuli from the environment. For behaviorists, the aim of teaching is to help the individual achieve the correct response. They make clear distinctions among intellectual, affective and physical developments and behaviors, and in kindergarten, behaviorists emphasize the mastery of specific skills that are considered prerequisites for further learning. Instruction is often presented to small homogeneous-ability groups. Listening and following instructions are emphasized. Preparation for first grade is the main goal. Block building is used as a reward, a "free-choice" activity, for completing a teacher-directed task, not an integral part of a behaviorist kindergarten curriculum.

Interactionist. The interactionist approach is not a separate learning theory, but rather a combination of certain practical and theoretical elements of both maturation and behaviorism. Interactionists acknowledge the influence on learning of both nature and nurture. They believe that knowledge exists both in the child and in external reality. The child develops and expands knowledge through interaction with and adaptation to the physical and social environment by questioning, forming ideas, testing and modifying on the basis of new information. The emphasis is on concrete experiences that help develop cognitive understanding. The role of the teacher is to facilitate by offering comments, questions and problem-solving situations. Children's play with blocks, for example, is presumed to reflect their current understanding of the world, of spatial relationships and quantity. Eventually the child will discover that a broad foundation of blocks is required to support a tall building. The teacher encourages trial and error, leaving the child to formulate the solution.

Influence on kindergarten programming

From 1900 until the 1950s, the influence of maturationists G. Stanley Hall and Arnold Gesell prevailed. The function of kindergarten was to ease the adjustment to school. The educational turmoil following the 1957 launch of Sputnik I by the Soviet Union, however, affected even the American kindergarten. Educators began to suggest that five-year-olds were capable of starting formal academic instruction. Behaviorists B. F. Skinner and R. Gagne had a significant impact on instructional methods, and behaviorism has continued to influence kindergarten philosophy and curricula over the last 25 years. The use of workbooks and worksheets for developing reading and math-readiness skills indicate the dominant influence of behaviorism.

Ironically, while the kindergarten curriculum has become increasingly behavioristic, developmental psychologists have moved away from behaviorism toward interactionism. Piaget's work on how children think at different stages has had a major impact. Early childhood practices espoused by leading educators and endorsed by professional organizations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the International Reading Association, are generally based on an interactionist approach.

Developmental characteristics

Despite the public perception--or misperception--that today's kindergartners are more mature than those of previous generations, they are still only five years old. The differences in their maturity cannot be predicted by chronological age, but the consequence of urging them to attempt activities beyond their normal and individual levels of development will be stress.

The balance of this chapter discusses the different developmental stages and the diverse understandings of kindergarten children which teachers must take into account. Charts provide timetables and developmental profiles, suggesting that a "range of development" is more appropriate than the concept of a "typical kindergartner." It is important also to understand that a child's development represents growth at different rates along several continua. The developmental areas, however--intellectual, physical and social-emotional--are interrelated.

Meeting special needs

In addition to meeting the individual needs of children within a wide range of development, the kindergarten teacher is routinely expected to meet the needs of one or more exceptional children who may be physically or developmentally handicapped. To meet their needs, a kindergarten program should:

- focus on children's abilities rather than on their disabilities;
- offer appropriate physical environments and planned learning experiences; and
- provide for meaningful parent involvement.

The potentially gifted or talented child also poses a special challenge to teachers. Gifted children have longer attention spans, good memories and advanced vocabularies. They tend to ask more questions and become bored more easily. However, they are often content to be alone, spending time in purposeful activity and reflection.

Teachers with exceptional children in their classrooms need special training and support. The State Department of Education's booklet, *Identification Process, A Resource Guide to Procedures for Locating, Screening and Assessing Young Children With Special Needs in Connecticut* (1981), provides information on the identification of young children who have special needs. Additional help is available from the Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services.

Chapter 3
Guiding Principles for a Quality Kindergarten

High quality kindergarten programs will emerge if the underlying guiding principles are sound and appropriate for young children and if four components of program effectiveness--teacher qualifications, class size and adult/student ratio, curriculum and learning environment, and parent participation--are given consideration. This chapter addresses staffing, administrative support and the learning environment. Other chapters speak to the curriculum and the home-school partnership.

The phrase most often used to describe quality kindergarten programs is "developmentally appropriate." It is the theme throughout this guide and is documented by research and position statements from leading educators and professional associations. Appropriate programs are based on an understanding of how young children learn and are free of inappropriate or unrealistic expectations.

Examples of principles inherent in quality kindergarten programs, selected from the more extensive list in the guide, are:

- Different levels of ability and development are expected, valued and accepted.
- Goals are individual and realistic so that each child is challenged to optimal performance.
- Play is respected for its value as a means of learning.
- Each child has opportunities to succeed and to learn from mistakes.
- School personnel and parents work cooperatively to build a partnership that will support the child throughout the school experience.

Identifying a quality program

In order to identify a high quality program, look for four components:

Teacher qualifications and training. The best qualified teachers have specific training in early childhood education and child development and have experience working with young children. They participate in professional development so that their skills are constantly being improved and renewed.

Class size and adult/child ratio. A good quality program limits class size to 20 children and maintains an adult/child ratio of 1 to 10 or fewer.

Curriculum and learning environment. An adequate program has an integrated curriculum that provides a nonthreatening environment for learning, comfortable interaction with adults, encouragement for children to be verbally expressive, and opportunities for independent activity and play.

The teacher's roles

Roles discussed in the guide include nurturer, observer, planner, facilitator, interactor, evaluator and communicator. For each of these roles, there is a list of competencies required and strategies that the teacher may use in carrying out that function. To illustrate, we have selected one of the several competencies and strategies associated with each of the seven roles (see page 7).

Roles Teachers Play

A sample competency and strategy for each role

Role	Competency	Strategy
Nurturer	making each child feel special and valued as an individual	giving each child some individual attention and recognition each day
Observer	looking for patterns in behavior exhibited at different times and in different situations	setting up checklists to record frequently observed behaviors
Planner	modifying plans on basis of children's spontaneous interests and planning for learning alternatives	holding a class meeting at the beginning of the day to discuss plans
Facilitator	organizing the physical space to encourage exploration, independence and harmony	allowing children to leave up works-in-progress (block structures, for example) for completion next day
Interactor	raising questions and making comments that add to children's information and understanding of their exploration and experiences	responding to children's endeavors with "What did you discover?" or "Can you try it a different way?"
Evaluator	having an awareness of different learning styles	developing a checklist to record the various skills and concepts individual children master
Communicator	summarizing children's individual development and needs clearly and positively	encouraging parents and administrators to visit the kindergarten to see a customary day

Implications. Every kindergarten teacher should aspire to the competencies and strategies presented in the guide. The experienced teacher already possesses many of the competencies listed and probably uses some of the strategies. All teachers, whether experienced or new, should welcome support in developing and refining their ability to play their multiple roles effectively.

Class size and adult/student ratio

Most studies of the relationship between class size and academic achievement show that smaller classes are more effective than large ones. Desirable child behavior, frequent adult and child interaction and accelerated gains on tests that predict school success are all generated in small classes. Children in smaller classes engage in more divergent thinking, grow in basic skill proficiency, and develop more positive attitudes.

Small classes allow teachers to individualize instruction, keep in touch with children's and parents' needs, and vary instructional methods. Large classes impose heavy physical and psychological demands on teachers which may allow little time to continue their own education and intellectual growth.

For these reasons the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Council and the Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children recommend a class size of 20 or fewer children and an adult/child ratio of 1:10. To achieve this, every kindergarten teacher should have a paraprofessional aide.

Auxiliary staff

Other staff members, in addition to paraprofessional aides (e.g., curriculum specialists, student teachers and volunteers), can make invaluable contributions. The roles of auxiliary staff are discussed in this section.

Teacher assistants. Although salaried teacher assistants may lack certification in early childhood education, they are crucial to the day-to-day operation of the kindergarten. They may be mothers or fathers who desire part-time work, young people interested in social service careers, retired persons (including former preschool and kindergarten teachers) or college students who want classroom experience. Assistants, directed by the teacher, reinforce children's learning. Because they know the daily routine, save teacher time, maintain classroom consistency and help the learning process, teacher assistants are indispensable.

Curriculum and support service specialists. The influence of these specialists can be both direct and indirect. They usually serve one or more schools and cooperate closely with school principals, with one another and with classroom teachers.

Art, music, physical education and library media specialists generally associated with the elementary grades can make valuable contributions to the kindergarten classroom as well. Children benefit not only from the specific activities but also from the experience of working with different adults. The primary responsibility, however, for the kindergarten program and for integrating what the specialists have taught into a nonsegmented curriculum remains with the classroom teacher.

Specialists in reading/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and foreign languages can also serve as resources. Support service personnel with whom teachers may work include the school nurse, speech and hearing or language development specialist, social worker, psychological and guidance counselors, and special education teachers.

Volunteers. Volunteers may be parents who have special interests or abilities they want to share with children, high school and college students interested in a teaching career, community law enforcement and public safety personnel, business people and professionals, musicians,

crafts people, retired teachers and/or administrators, or grandparents and other senior citizens. The role of volunteers is discussed in Chapter 7, "Building a Home-School-Community Partnership."

Other school personnel. Because children are affected by everyone with whom they come in contact, it is important that cafeteria, custodial and secretarial staff understand the kindergarten goals and communicate well with children. If these adults greet the children warmly, reflect caring attitudes toward them and include them in some activities related to their own responsibilities, they can add to the children's love of school and to their ability to relate to a variety of adults.

Staff selection and professional development

To fulfill his/her many roles, the kindergarten teacher must have a broad background in the liberal arts and be specifically trained in early childhood education. Teachers must know what constitutes effective and positive learning experiences for early childhood at all developmental levels. The guide provides information on evaluating new graduates and veteran teachers, and the skills teachers need in relating to young children's social and emotional needs.

In addition to providing professional development programs for experienced teachers who wish to begin teaching kindergarten, many districts offer valuable programs for new teachers. A set of guidelines for effective, comprehensive programs, prepared by the State Department of Education's Bureau of Professional Development (1985), is included in the guide.

Administrative support

Developing and implementing a child-centered, high quality kindergarten program requires full and complete administrative support for every component of the program. To gain a clear understanding of what constitutes a topnotch early childhood program, administrators should attend professional development programs on the subject; some administrators may wish to take a course in early childhood education.

Even when educational decisions are made jointly with teachers and parents, as they are in the best programs, the final stages of decision making are the responsibility of the administrator who must clarify and defend the program and persuade those with the authority to provide funding to support the program. A key point to remember is that, although pressures for early achievement have intensified in recent years, the ways a four- or five-year-old child grows and learns have remained constant. The world has changed; children have not. There is no way to speed up the process of growing, developing and learning. The basic kindergarten curriculum must revolve around language and play activity that accommodates varied rates of growth and development.

In the quest for a quality program that provides the greatest benefit to the children, administrators must give top priority to staff selection and staff assignments. An important concept to keep in mind is the need for a planned continuum of educational experiences throughout the elementary grades. The range of individual differences is greater in the early childhood years than at any other stage. Kindergarten teachers should not be expected to "get children ready" for first grade any more than first grade teachers should "get children ready" for second grade. They provide for each child the program, materials and services that are appropriate for that child's learning level.

Numerous studies have documented the importance of the principal's role. Principals can insure that programs are beneficial rather than harmful by encouraging the development of programs that are designed to build a solid base for future learning rather than to accelerate the intellectual growth of the young child.

The learning environment

Children respond to places as well as to objects and people. Places can be frightening or friendly. The school environment--facilities, equipment and materials--should invite children to participate in activities and to observe, experiment, explore, discover and create. A quality kindergarten, therefore, requires many types of materials and equipment appropriately arranged in a suitable space to create a place for adults and children to work together. This section of the guide describes the physical setting. Here are some excerpts:

Indoor space. The kindergarten classroom space should be adaptable, flexible, livable and welcoming. Children should be able to move about easily and work in groups. Arrangement of space into activity centers is particularly effective. Centers should be organized into clearly defined areas, using shelves, dividers and tables to create "L" or "U" shaped areas. Each center should include storage facilities as well as work/play space. Shelves, containers, wastebaskets and supplies should be labeled with symbols or pictures to encourage children to clean up and put away materials. Separate noisy activities from quiet ones and divert traffic from areas where it will disturb work or cause accidents. Locate centers near the needed facilities--electrical outlets or water--and arrange centers so that they are easily visible to the teacher.

Equipment and materials. Appropriate materials and equipment will invite children to come together, to learn through manipulating, constructing, moving and interacting with the physical environment and the people in it. They are as essential to the kindergarten as textbooks are to the upper elementary grades.

Materials that are too complex or too simple should not be used. It is essential that the kindergarten teacher plan the introduction of materials in relation to the program goals. Criteria for the selection of materials and equipment include safety, quality and durability, cost, flexibility and instructional value.

Outdoor space. Outdoor space should be an extension of the kindergarten classroom where children can move freely, exercise and develop their motor skills. Outdoor play can also contribute to cognitive development and communication and social skills, giving children a sense of independence.

Because educators are realizing the many benefits which come from gross motor play, the equipment and materials for outdoor play have undergone several changes in the past decade. One change is the emphasis on developing outdoor areas that take advantage of the beauty and natural landscape, incorporating hillsides or wooded areas into the play space. Another change is the development of "junk playgrounds."

Junk playgrounds may include items for climbing, crawling, balancing, walking and running, hopping, swinging, sliding, stacking and building, bouncing and pretending, to name some of the possible activities that tires, logs, ropes, scrap lumber and mattresses may generate. Some schools have created very successful play spaces using industrial materials or recycled items. Parents sometimes provide the labor and expertise to build the play space. In planning an outdoor play space, a major consideration is health and safety.

Library media resources. As soon as children enter school, instructional technology--including computers--is part of their learning environment. A well-developed library media center contains many types of equipment and materials, including print, visual, audio and mixed media such as dioramas, models, puzzles, replicas, sculptures and other art objects. Children can use the materials in the library media center or the media specialist may bring the materials to the classroom.

Daily story time, whether with the kindergarten teacher or library media specialist, is one of the highlights of a quality kindergarten program. Children are captivated by the world they enter through literature; they love repetition, asking to have "old favorites" read again and again. Broadening children's language experiences through literature, poetry and storytelling forms a rich background for learning to read.

Wordless books allow those who do not read to tell and retell stories through pictures. Concept books help to refine and elaborate on the concepts children are learning.

Children can also learn many library media skills. They can master the media center's organization and become familiar with its personnel and procedures. They can select and use some materials themselves. They may learn to analyze, organize and interpret information, and to communicate through oral, written and visual materials.

To make sure that the materials and services support teaching and learning, teachers and library media specialists need to work together, so that teachers are kept up-to-date about what is available in the media center and media specialists know the schedule of various classroom activities.

A Minnesota Department of Education publication, *Kindergarten Excellence: Knowledge and Competencies of Kindergarten Teachers* (1986), suggests that teachers can facilitate the use of media and technology by gaining skills in using film, filmstrip, slide, overhead and opaque projectors; videotape and cassette recorders; record player; reproduction machine; microcomputers and television. Children's activities will be enriched if the teacher also understands viewing skills and provides viewing opportunities for children.

Computers. Microcomputers and related technology are potentially powerful tools for the kindergarten curriculum, but like other resources, careful planning must precede their infusion into the classroom. While computers will never replace blocks, dolls, trucks or crayons, they can help children count, add and subtract. Most five-year-olds can play games on the microcomputer that compare numbers, letters, words, shapes, colors, sounds, amounts and other concepts. Some computer programs permit children to work together on a task. Some teachers, however, may need training in basic programming skills so that they can choose appropriate software or individualize programs for children.

One of the major functions of computers is the delivery of individualized instruction. Kindergarten teachers can plan instructional activities in which the rate of response, level of difficulty, mode of learning, type of feedback and amount of practice can be varied according to a child's needs. Computer technology also permits teachers to provide special activities that might otherwise be difficult or impossible for children to experience. Graphic tools, music utilities, and robots, for example, offer highly motivational learning experiences.

In working with special needs children, the value of individualized instruction, immediate feedback and positive learning environment provided by computers cannot be overemphasized. Computers also can help children overcome or compensate for disabilities; they can "read" for the print handicapped, "write" for the paralyzed or mobility-impaired, "speak" for vocally handicapped, and "move" for physically disabled children.

When they use microcomputers, all kindergarten children are highly motivated and obviously pleased with the sense of control and competence they get from using such a powerful machine. Unlike television, the computer lets them actively manipulate what appears on the screen.

In the final analysis, however, the microcomputer's value as a learning tool is dependent on how it is used by the kindergarten teacher. And while the guidelines for the planning and arrangement of space and equipment may be useful, the teacher must constantly be aware of the original program goals in order to create and sustain an environment in which all children can grow and learn.

Chapter 4
Emotional and Social Development

As the child's first formal year in public school, kindergarten is the natural time to encourage an ability to function within a group. Important prerequisites are self-knowledge and self-confidence; two important signposts of emotional development. Emotional development, in turn, leads to the ability to communicate with others, to recognize and respect differences in others and to adapt to routine and to change. These abilities are indicators of social adjustment and, although interrelated, are separated here for purposes of discussion. The chapter also discusses the social stresses to which today's children are subjected and ways in which teachers can help children to cope.

Importance of self-concept

Everything children think and do is guided in part by how and what they think about themselves, that is, by their sense of self. Known as self-concept, self-worth or self-esteem, children develop it by interpreting events around them.

If parents and teachers treat children as capable learners, children try harder, do well in school and receive recognition. Research also shows that the reverse is true. Three implications emerge:

- a positive self-concept is preferable to a negative one;
- the child's self-concept is malleable; and
- the kindergarten classroom is an ideal laboratory for building positive feelings of worth.

Some children may require extra help to raise their self-concepts. Telltale signs are frequent negative comments about themselves, avoiding their peers or being avoided by them, continually seeking reassurance or attention, and setting unreasonable goals, too high or too low.

The guide suggests numerous activities through which teachers can help children to improve their self-concepts.

Social development

Kindergarten teachers aim to foster three basic social skills: effective communication (verbal and nonverbal), respect for individual differences and self-discipline leading to autonomy. The stages of social development among students in the class will cover a wide range, from those who can manage only one friend at a time to those who prefer cooperative activities in larger groups. The sensitive teacher will vary group sizes to accommodate as many styles as possible and will guide each child into strategies that will help him/her find an acceptable niche in the class.

Effective communication. Because communication is a basic strategy for social interaction, it is important for children to develop listening and speaking skills. Learning these skills can be integrated into other areas of the curriculum, especially language arts.

Respect for individual differences. People differ in age, appearance, race, sex, ethnicity and occupation. Children need to be exposed to as many different examples as possible in order to avoid forming stereotypes. The overall goal is for children to celebrate differences as they learn to value the contributions of all members of our society. A checklist in the guide may help teachers judge how well they are communicating this acceptance of societal difference. Also included are guidelines suggested by the Council on Interracial Books for Children to use in

selecting and evaluating children's books and an extensive list of books that foster social and emotional development.

Fostering self-discipline

Children must be offered the freedom to test their own limits, to make decisions and to govern their own actions. At the same time, they need adult protection to keep them from harmful mistakes. This is one of the challenges of kindergarten teaching--communicating responsibility and trust so that children can begin to handle freedom.

Discipline and punishment differ. Discipline emphasizes what the child should do; punishment emphasizes what the child should not do. Discipline is ongoing, whereas punishment is a one-time occurrence. Punishment undermines independence, tells the child what to think and forces the child to behave. Discipline, by contrast, fosters the child's ability to think, to assert self, and to change.

Discipline in the classroom. In a classroom where good discipline is evident, children behave courteously, accept responsibility for their own actions, lead and/or follow as necessary, use materials appropriately and adapt to daily routines. The teacher is a role model and facilitator.

Setting classroom conditions

The arrangement of classroom space and materials to facilitate learning and development is discussed in Chapters 3 and 5. In addition to the problems created by overcrowded work and play areas, misbehavior will result if the activities and teacher expectations are too demanding, too easy, too irrelevant or too formal. If children must sit or stand for long periods, if they are not permitted to talk or move around the room, and if they do not have enough time to do the things they want to do, problems will occur.

Discipline and development. The kindergarten year is one in which the child develops finer shades and gradations of feelings as well as responses to stimuli. Therefore, as children move to concern for meeting external social expectations, it is an appropriate time to work with them to build a sense of self-control. The desired result for each child is autonomy and self-governance instead of blind obedience to others.

Teachers must recognize, however, that kindergarten children bring with them strong feelings and behavior patterns for expressing their anger, fear, jealousy, humor, lack of affection, and grief, as well as expressions of joy and happiness, and that teachers must respond to the whole range of their emotions.

Sources of stress on kindergarten children

In recent years, the potential sources of stress on children have multiplied. When children are affected by stress, schools are affected. The balance of this chapter discusses some sources of stress and suggests ways to help children handle the stresses to which they are subjected.

Changing family structures. The family of two parents--one who works outside the home and one whose primary vocation is child care--is no longer typical. An increasing number of Connecticut children do not live with a parent at all. Each month an average of 2,054 children are in foster care. One of every 25 babies has a teenage mother, many of whom rely on a grandmother or aunt for the child's care.

Six and one-half million children in the United States live in "blended families" formed through divorce and remarriage. By 1990, as many as one of every four children may live in a single-parent household. Currently, one of every five children in the United States is born to an unmarried woman, and divorce, which ends one of every five marriages, also accounts for many single-parent homes. In 1980 alone, divorces in Connecticut affected 13,790 children.

Clearly, family life conditions like these can place stress on parent and child. Some research on stepfamilies suggests that children in these households experience more stress and ambivalence, and less unity, than those in natural parent homes, especially in the first year or two of adjustment. Children in stepfamilies report more feelings of rejection, and some research cites these children as more prone to negativism and aggression. Lower achievement and increased absenteeism are documented results of divorce on children, and families of children born out of wedlock face enormous financial and emotional burdens.

Employment patterns. The two-earner family is becoming typical. By 1990, a projected 50 percent or more of married women with children under six will work outside the home. Although research on the specific effects of working mothers is inconclusive, many factors stemming from the two-earner or single-parent family's situation affect kindergarten children.

The numbers of children in day care or at home alone--"latchkey children"--have increased. When mothers work, children may spend time in one or more day-care settings before and/or after school. For some children, this arrangement may create inconsistency, confusion and anxiety. Nationally, millions of school-age children are left alone after 3 p.m. each day. While some can manage on their own, many face frightening, lonely or dangerous periods alone during the school year, on school holidays and summer vacations. While the number of working mothers is increasing, suitable day care has become more scarce and costs are prohibitive for many families. Few of the nation's public school districts provide before and after school programs. Many parents have few options but to leave their children alone for some part of the day.

In addition, two-worker and single-parent families often have little time to assist in the child's education by taking the child to the library, expanding on the child's interests at home and attending school conferences and events.

Poverty. In Connecticut, one of every seven children under the age of six lives in poverty. Statewide, 39 percent of single-parent families headed by women live below the poverty level. The feelings of helplessness, futility and injustice in these homes is communicated to the children. They may feel shame and embarrassment at inadequate clothing or school supplies, free or reduced-price lunches or other differences in financial status. Inadequate nutrition and insufficient health care may also lead to stress. Indirect results of poverty--inadequate housing, unsafe play areas, drug pushers in apartment hallways, frightening incidents on the way to school --can also be stressful.

Child abuse, discipline and parental expectations. Extreme conditions of parental frustration, tension and depression can lead to child abuse. Abuse and neglect not only endanger the child's physical well-being, they also jeopardize healthy social-emotional growth. Reported cases of child abuse increase each year.

Too many children are expected to assume control, to be alert and cautious, to reason and decide what is right and wrong, without any clear guidance from parents. And parents under stress tend to share adult problems with children who cannot understand violence, death, sexual fulfillment, and who become confused, threatened and feeling guilty for the adult's pain.

Societal stresses and expectations. Some educators and parents believe that today's kindergartners are more sophisticated and knowledgeable than children of prior decades. Today, one of every two children who enters kindergarten has been to some kind of early childhood program and an increasing number of preschools use an academically-oriented curriculum. Children's television has exposed them to many pre-academic concepts. To some parents and educators, this means children need an academically-enriched kindergarten curriculum.

Some school administrators feel pressured by parents and school boards to produce better "products," as measured by standardized test scores, and have responded by beginning basic skills earlier. They often favor academic kindergarten programs, especially with an emphasis on early reading. What these adults forget is that, while kindergartners may appear to be more mature, they are still five-year-olds and the way in which they grow and learn cannot be speeded up.

Television, books and films portraying children as more adult than they are constitute another of society's pressures on children to grow up fast. Television has also brought accounts of global war, terrorist events and the threat of nuclear war into the lives of children.

Family events as stressors. For some children, the birth of a baby into the family or the death of a parent, sibling or grandparent can cause severe stress at the time of the event.

Behaviors that may signal that a child is reacting to stress from some source include daydreaming, inability to concentrate, unusual sensitivity to mild criticism, hyperactivity or restlessness, refusal to participate in group activities, sleeping in school and rarely smiling or laughing.

Ways to handle stressed children

Appropriate ways for the teacher and/or the school to handle children who are being adversely affected by stress from various sources are suggested below.

Cause of Stress	Teacher Response
Society's demands	Do not expect more than children can deliver at their developmental level. Encourage parents and school boards to decrease unrealistic demands. Inform the community about what children can and cannot do. In the classroom, encourage children to attempt activities in which they will succeed.
Family changes	Form special discussion groups for parents and children, conducted by social workers and school guidance counselors. Develop close family-school linkages so that parents feel free to communicate with the school. Be a resource for information and referral when parents ask for help, and refer particularly difficult problems to a school guidance or social worker. Be aware of and accept different family patterns. During family-oriented activities casually mention that "some of us will want to make two Mother's Day cards, one for mother, one for stepmother" or "some children like to celebrate Father's Day by making a gift for a special grown-up like a grandfather, uncle or friend." Examine your own attitudes and prejudices about families. Do you expect a child from a broken home to misbehave? Do you see stepmothers as incapable of maternal caring and nurturing?
Working parents	Arrange and be sure to announce some booster activities in which working mothers and fathers can participate: room parent, playground building, donation of "found" materials. Don't insist that parents come in; use the telephone. Team up with another teacher to cover for each other at lunch break so that you can meet with parents during the noon hour.

(continued)

Cause of Stress	Teacher Response
Abuse and neglect	Become familiar with the signs of abuse, the laws of the state, and the procedures to be followed in your school district. In general, teachers are expected to report their concerns to an administrator and then to work with the responsible parties to secure protection for the child. Never undermine unnecessarily the parent-child bond. Consider establishing a child-care program within the school for before and after school.
Poverty	Find out about agencies that supply emergency shelter, food and clothing. Some individuals may choose to volunteer and advocate for these agencies. Find ways to be sure children in temporary crisis or chronic poverty get what they need without shame. Get families and local groups to donate clothing--jackets, boots, mittens--and books. Do not distribute in front of other children; let the school nurse handle this. Be sure parents fill out and return all forms, such as reduced-price lunch forms.

Kindergarten-age children need to be allowed to rely on adults to care for them. Adults can reduce stress on children when they listen and try to understand children's points of view. Adults can alleviate stress when they protect children's physical safety and insulate them from societal pressure. When children are allowed to play and to explore within clearly identified boundaries, they have an outlet for stress and a means of building confidence in their ability to master the world.

Chapter 5
Learning in Kindergarten

The known developmental characteristics of kindergarten children and the approach to learning that most early childhood educators favor--an interactionist approach--should shape the kindergarten program. A program developed on these foundations will feature integrated curriculum areas and play as a primary mode of instruction. The interactionist approach, integrated curriculum, and the development of critical thinking are all related to the total kindergarten program.

What is the integrated curriculum?

An integrated approach to curriculum recognizes that content areas in instruction are naturally interrelated as they are in real life experiences. A classroom in which an integrated curriculum is used is usually organized like a workshop that offers choices of many activities. These activities are generated by the interests of teacher and children and serve as contexts for what is learned. Movement, conversation and self-directed learning are encouraged.

Teachers who integrate children's learning seldom divide the day into periods for mathematics, science, language, social studies, the arts and physical education; they refrain from setting inflexible objectives for what children will learn. Rather, they encourage children to investigate a topic or a set of materials and help them to learn from their investigations.

An assumption underlying the integrated curriculum is that when people have learned something they apply it to new situations. They then reflect on this experience and add to their knowledge.

Another underlying assumption is that learning is a process rather than a collection of facts. An integrated curriculum reflects the holistic view of learning, which suggests that learning is natural, inevitable and meaningful when it is related to personal inquiry.

Does integrating the curriculum support a child development point of view?

In an integrated curriculum children can engage in activities in ways that are appropriate to each one's level of development. For example, one child playing with a box of buttons may sort them according to color or size while another may use them to form letters and spell a word. Teachers help an individual child to learn from an activity by suggesting new uses or by asking questions that encourage seeing and using materials in a new way.

Integrating curriculum areas through activity, especially through play, provides flexibility to meet children's needs and capabilities and capitalizes on individual interests.

When teachers provide for integrated learning, they foster the development of children's ability to make choices, to solve problems, to design tasks and to discover facts that have personal meaning for them. Allowing children to choose activities is vital because, when children are interested, learning is inevitable.

When children choose an activity that interests them, they need enough time to become involved with the materials or people in a lasting and purposeful way. Dividing a school day into periods of study for each content area often results in putting children through a series of introductions, conclusions and transitions. Separating subject matter into content areas may be appropriate for older children who are conceptually able to arrange different areas into a unified whole, but fragmentation is difficult for young children who are still developing the ability to consider a whole idea and its parts simultaneously.

The integrated, activity-based curriculum recognizes kindergartners' need for freedom of movement and opportunities to develop language and social skills through spontaneous interaction with peers and teachers.

A kindergarten curriculum that is consistent with an interactionist view of learning and an understanding of child development will

- provide for active learning;
- use life's experiences as a basis for learning;
- reflect the holistic nature of learning;
- present content areas as interrelated;
- meet children's individual needs;
- capitalize on children's interests;
- allow children to make choices;
- help children develop initiative and self-reliance;
- foster interaction with materials and people; and
- provide large blocks of time so that children can become involved with their learning experiences.

Utilizing activity centers

Activity centers are a good approach to organizing space and time to achieve an integrated, activity-oriented curriculum. They may be called interest centers, play centers or learning centers. A center's value for children is not determined by its label but by its effectiveness in involving children in play. However, some teachers find it useful to categorize centers into two general types:

- curriculum-area centers featuring manipulatives for mathematics and fine motor development, materials for language development and science exploration, etc.;
- interactive learning centers designed to provide types of play such as drama, construction and art-media.

If centers are categorized, each type should offer a wide variety of play activities. Too many choices at one time, however, can overwhelm young children. Some teachers solve this problem by limiting to five or six the number of centers a child may use each day. Others may offer as many as 12 choices, but group centers by category and allow children to select only one category at a given time.

The possibilities are limitless. Centers may be prepared by the teacher with some potential activity in mind or assembled spontaneously by children to meet a particular interest. Popular topics are construction, library, cooking, games, science exploration, art, dramatics and a motor development center with access to indoor and outdoor areas for climbing, running, jumping and balancing.

If a teacher wants children to explore information about a particular foreign country (social science), the library center can feature picture books, posters and maps of that country. Costumes depicting the native dress of that area of the world may be included in the drama center, and the media center may offer tapes, records and filmstrips of the music and art of the featured country. In the cooking center, children can experiment with simple foreign recipes.

Many teachers find that a scrapbook with photographs of children involved in a center helps parents visualize children engaged in learning.

Balancing center activity. The use of activity centers requires careful planning to insure proper balance among important teaching considerations:

- **Balancing supervision and independence.** Choices allowed must take into account the need to balance activities that can be carried out by children independently and those that require close adult supervision. In a classroom with two adults, concurrently offering children woodworking, cooking, fingerpainting and obstacle courses would lead to obvious problems. One way to avoid problems is to provide one choice which needs adult supervision and four or five other choices that children can handle with relative independence. With this arrangement, the second adult can circulate, observing children's activities and facilitating their learning. This allows for more individualized instruction.

- **Balancing movement and space.** Four- to six-year-olds need opportunities to move freely. During the largest part of the day, children should be provided with large, relatively open spaces, defined by screens, shelves, rugs or other markers. Approximately one-third to one-half of the day should be spent in activities involving movement.

  Kindergarten children can function effectively and comfortably in moderately structured, less open spaces for shorter periods of time. Centers which require quieter activity and less movement, like reading or painting, should be limited to approximately one-fourth of the day.

  Most kindergarten children can sit quietly in a whole-class grouping for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Several of these short periods may be included in the remaining one-fourth of the day.

This balance in allocating time may not be possible on days when specialists in music, art or physical education are scheduled. For this reason, scheduling no more than one specialist per session is preferable. A modified balance can be maintained if the nature of the specialist's activity is considered, e.g. a physical education period which provides lots of freedom of movement may be considered part of the large movement component.

Unifying learning through a theme

Another way to integrate the curriculum is by using "themes" to organize learning activities. Themes can be selected by children or by teachers. They are often topics related to social studies or science, such as people in Africa or mice.

With the theme of detectives, for example, the writing center is transformed into a secret code room; the block center becomes a police station; the drama center is the detective agency; the easel paintings are "wanted" posters; sand reveals footprints and fingerprints; art center materials are made into disguises; and the science center becomes a laboratory where evidence is analyzed. Learning is not only unified and meaningful but also fun and exciting.

Children's books are also a rich source of themes. Folk tales and myths align with a study of peoples from other lands. Mysteries have a strong link with the inductive thinking associated with science, and counting books and math go hand in hand.

Interactive learning

Play is called interactive learning when it is seen as the way children learn about themselves and the world. It is an adventure, an experiment, a beginning toward mastery of fundamental physical, social and intellectual concepts. Different types of play offer different opportunities for learning.

Dramatic play, for example, includes imitation, verbal communication between two or more people, role playing and acting out situations. Construction play uses blocks, Legos, and other

building materials that can be assembled in a variety of ways. Tactile play offers opportunities to mix, stir, pour, squish, mold and drip, using materials rich in potential for sensory experience. Language play occurs when children use spoken words, parts of words, or made-up words for sheer entertainment. Gross motor play using large muscles in repetitive motions takes place in climbing, riding a bike and swinging.

How play contributes to growth

Research reveals that play fosters intellectual growth. Children allowed to play freely with designated materials exhibit more thinking skills and problem-solving abilities than those not given the opportunity to play. Children who are allowed to play are also found to be more goal-directed and persistent.

Other research indicates that play leads to the development of precision in language. The child needs to be able to describe who he or she is, what he or she is doing, what different objects represent. In creating stories among themselves, children develop the ability to understand and retell stories and can answer subjective questions about a story more easily than their counterparts who have had less opportunity for this type of play.

Creativity, researchers find, is another product of play, and reading success is a byproduct, as children develop visual perception and use symbolic representation in play.

- **Play fosters physical growth.** The role of play in learning physical and perceptual skills has long been recognized. Sensory motor skills must be developed before reading, writing and arithmetic can be mastered. Some experts believe that the substitution of television-watching for active physical play has contributed to an increase in the number of learning disabled children.

- **Play fosters social-emotional growth.** Through play, children gain confidence in themselves and learn to trust others. They learn to give, receive, share, express feelings and make choices. Through dramatic play, children also grow in their abilities to plan cooperatively with others and to identify with a variety of societal roles. Dramatic play can relieve stress and tension and be a healthy way to express difficult feelings. A child can act out negative feelings toward a new sibling, for example, without harming anyone. Play is also a safe way to try out silly, taboo, frightening, absurd and funny ideas.

In a classroom setting, play holds together many facets of kindergartners' learning.

Curriculum areas

In planning an integrated curriculum, the teacher or curriculum planner must be aware of the various content areas for which activities must be designed. Part 2 of *A Guide to Program Development for Kindergarten* contains examples of activities in the major subject areas, including the arts, language development, mathematics, science, social studies and physical education. All curriculum areas provide for interactive learning through play.

The teacher's role is to insure that play activity results in interactive learning. This is what distinguishes play in the school from play outside kindergarten. Although learning can take place in either form of play, the purposeful involvement of the teacher and the context of the curriculum influence the amount of learning that takes place. Either by direct involvement or by choice of materials and the design of activity centers, teachers are always involved in the interactive learning process.

The guide contains a self-quiz of questions teachers can ask themselves to determine the extent to which they are enabling learning through play. For example:

- Did I introduce new materials gradually to assure mastery as well as novelty of experience?
- Did I encourage children to talk about their play?
- Did I observe children's activities to discover their ability to solve problems? Their interaction with peers?
- Did I facilitate learning by asking open-ended questions? Giving genuine praise?
- Did I help children resolve conflicts? Explore alternate uses for materials?

Teaching thinking skills

The idea of teaching thinking skills to kindergartners is new, but what is new is more a matter of pedagogy than of substance. The long-range goal is to educate children to reason and make choices. The inclusive term for using any combination of thinking skills is problem solving. Problem solving is just as essential for children in their daily living as it is for adults.

Social-emotional factors can affect thinking positively or negatively; fear or anxiety can block thinking while curiosity and interest can improve the quality of thought. Children's cultural backgrounds and their developmental levels also affect their thinking.

The concept of stages of cognitive development, originated by Jean Piaget (see Chapters 1 and 2), describes the growth of thinking as a vertical progression. Other experts, however, argue that development of thinking has a horizontal as well as a vertical direction. The important thing for teachers to keep in mind is that children are capable of a variety of thinking skills regardless of their grade level, age or intelligence. Teachers must also realize that, although kindergartners are thinking, the results of their thought may lack accuracy, logic, completeness and complexity, and that they need help from adults to structure and guide their thinking.

Teachers can help children develop thinking skills by converting their classrooms into "communities of inquiry." Because conversation is the main context in which thinking skills are learned, most strategies for teaching thinking skills can be translated into questions or comments. The nature of these questions and comments is crucial to learning. Questions must be open-ended, requiring a complete, thoughtful, individualized response rather than a "yes," "no," or "fill-in-the-blank" answer. The early years are the time to demonstrate that questions do not always have one right answer. When children give an unconventional answer, the teacher should accept it and explore further to get an insight into the child's cognitive developmental level.

Teachers' talk should not be just any kind of talk but talk which evokes differences of opinion. Teachers should listen to all children, not just to those who speak well. Sometimes teachers must wait for children to respond.

Opportunities for the development of thinking skills should take place throughout the kindergarten program as part of every child's experience.

Chapter 6
Organization of the Kindergarten

The teacher actively plans, implements and evaluates the learning environment each day. The process is circular and ongoing, with each evaluation serving as the basis for further planning. After the long-range goals for the year are established, specific short-term objectives must be developed that take into account each child's abilities, needs and prior experiences.

Planning. The teacher uses planning to organize large units of activity, to organize materials and equipment in advance, and to provide an overall framework for selecting and developing objectives and activities for children's growth. During the planning sessions, the teaching staff should:

- review and record child responses and growth within the classroom environment;
- review the organization of materials;
- review the children's use of equipment and materials;
- identify specific objectives that will reinforce and extend learning;
- develop classroom organization and activity to promote children's growth; and
- select methods for recording children's performance.

Implementation. Teachers and children work together in implementing the program. The teacher will use:

- specific activities to meet specific program objectives; and
- activities which integrate growth, e.g., cooking, in which children measure ingredients (intellectual growth), use the egg beater (physical growth) and plan the activity with other children (social growth).

In meeting individual needs, the teacher will

- observe and interact with individual children;
- give suggestions to a child needing help;
- assist children in evaluating their own work; and
- record a child's progress.

In using children's experiences, the teacher will

- provide activities in which children practice skills previously learned;
- develop the physical environment (bulletin boards, books, equipment) to reflect the children's cultural backgrounds; and
- use children's out-of-school interests (television, toys) as themes for activities.

To involve children in the planning and assessment process, the teacher will

- provide time for children to talk about what they have done in the classroom;
- encourage children to suggest activity themes and materials; and
- let children develop guidelines for participation in learning activities.

To support interaction, the teacher will

- listen to children's ideas;
- verbally acknowledge and reinforce children's activity;
- accept their language and ideas; and
- extend their ideas by adding information to the experiences they discuss.

Evaluation. As children become more involved in planning, they should actively assess those activities they have planned. The teacher's planning will also include collaborations with other professionals involved with the kindergarten program: teachers of physical education, art, music, and talented and gifted children, library-media and reading specialists and special education resource teachers.

Classroom management

Because children learn best by being actively involved in their environment in a variety of learning experiences, the kindergarten classroom is a very busy place. The teacher must have an effective management plan for each activity center. In *Kindergarten Excellence: Knowledge and Competencies of Kindergarten Teachers* (Minnesota Early Childhood Teacher Educators Kindergarten Task Force, 1986), the authors outline the three main aspects of classroom management: physical environment, routines and personnel. Under managing the physical environment, major topics dealt with are space, arrangement and storage of equipment and supplies, cleaning and the provision of learning/activity centers.

Among the routines to be managed so that children learn from them are arrivals and departures, attendance, milk count, lunchroom behavior, toileting procedures and speedy distribution and clean-up of materials and supplies.

Under managing personnel, the publication emphasizes the importance of building good interpersonal relations with all school personnel, not just other teachers. The list includes custodians, secretaries, nurses, lunchroom workers, counselors, bus drivers, librarians, special education teachers and social workers.

An important goal is to help children be independent learners who respect the rights and property of others and take responsibility for their own actions. One way is to allow them an active part in planning their work and in keeping track of tasks accomplished. Individual planning cards, a pocket chart holder and a pegboard chart are ways for each child to record his/her learning activities.

Scheduling the kindergarten day

Factors involved in the development of a workable schedule are the philosophy of the program, the developmental needs of the children, class size, size of the room, length of the day, physical facilities and resourcefulness of the staff.

Balance is the key. Some parts of the day will be group-oriented and teacher-directed; others will offer time for exploration/discovery and for children to pursue their own interests. There must be time for outdoor as well as indoor play. Snack and lunch times are important and a specific rest time should be incorporated into the full-day kindergarten program.

There should be a natural flow from one activity to another and time to complete projects. The schedule must be flexible to accommodate practice and extended learning experiences.

When classes such as art, music, physical education and library media are scheduled with specialists, it is helpful to spread them throughout the week so that children have a variety of learning activities every day to complement the kindergarten program.

Intervention programs for children who require special services should be scheduled early in the year so that children who have weaknesses in language, motor skills, or visual and auditory abilities will receive support services as soon as possible.

Pacing and scheduling should respond to the varied attention spans of the children.

The full text of the kindergarten guide contains sample schedules for half-day, extended- and full-day kindergartens.

Organizing an extended-day kindergarten

Scheduling a high quality kindergarten program into a half day is often difficult if not impossible. Many districts, therefore, are lengthening the kindergarten day.

An extended-day kindergarten, as defined in Connecticut statutes, provides for 180 school days of four or more classroom hours or a minimum of no fewer than 720 hours per school year. Full-day kindergarten is provided for the same number of hours as any other grade.

The principal reason for offering an extended- or full-day kindergarten is to meet the needs of children and their families.

Quality programs

An extended-day kindergarten is not a mini-first grade. It should be a happy, relaxed experience--stimulating, creative and joyful--that reduces stress rather than increasing pressure on children for more academic learning at an earlier age.

The components of the program should be no different than for a half-day program, but in an extended-day or a full-day kindergarten, teachers have more time to provide experiences that will meet each child's individual needs. Children who have special talents can pursue more challenging activities and each child can regularly encounter success, develop friendly peer relationships and positive attitudes about school and learning. In later years, some children who have attended extended-day programs may require fewer remedial services.

Transition to an extended-day program

When a school district decides to lengthen its kindergarten session, it must carefully consider its reasons for making the change, its school population, parental attitudes and expectations and the attitudes and training of its kindergarten teachers. Forming an advisory committee to study current literature and research and to visit schools where kindergarten classes have been lengthened can be helpful. Options include:

- extending the day to four hours or more from the traditional two-and-a-half hour day, with the teacher having only one group of children;

- providing an all-day program where each child has two full days and three extended days each week, enabling teachers to work closely with small groups during the afternoon;

- phasing in the full-day program during the first four to six weeks of school, with children gradually moving from a half-day to a four- or five-hour day, and then to a full day; and

- piloting extended-day or full-day programs in selected classrooms.

The Connecticut Early Childhood Education Council's *Report on Full-Day Kindergarten* (1983) suggests a three-phase transition. The first phase would include collecting data on extended-day programs, ascertaining needs, surveying parents, giving staff the opportunity to visit and observe such programs, and presenting a proposal to the local board of education.

Phase 2 would allow time for planning, including developing goals and objectives, by a team of early childhood educators. Additional teachers and classrooms will probably be needed and frequent professional development days must be scheduled in which teachers can work on curriculum and program planning. Each elementary school where the program will be provided should hold meetings with parents to discuss the program and its implications for their children.

Phase 3 calls for continual evaluation of the extended- or full-day program after it is implemented in order to make necessary changes. Time must be scheduled for ongoing professional development for teachers and their assistants and for periodic meetings with parents.

What will the children do?

A longer day allows more time for language experiences; for exploration, discovery and problem solving; for the arts; and for physical activity and play. There should be more opportunities for continuity and reinforcement of experiences through individual, small group and large group activities, and for the development of positive self-esteem.

Lengthening the school day should not lead to a more academic, highly structured pencil-and-paper program or the equivalent of a first-grade curriculum. Care must be taken not to equate "real" learning and "more" learning, with workbooks, ditto sheets and the improvement of test scores viewed as the primary evidence of learning. Manipulatives and hands-on experiences are the real textbooks of the kindergarten, and more time should be devoted to them.

One of the biggest differences in developing a schedule for a longer day, rather than for a two and one-half hour day, is the provision of personal needs activities. In a full-day program there should be morning and afternoon snacks and a nutritious lunch. Children should eat in small groups with a familiar adult. Lunch time should be a relaxed and enjoyable learning experience, as well as a chance for socializing. Lunch is usually followed by outdoor play. Play areas should be close to the building but separated from those of older children. The program should also include an extended rest period when children may lie on cots or mats. Children who do not sleep should be permitted to use equipment or materials that will not disturb sleeping children.

Advantages and disadvantages

For a list of the advantages and possible disadvantages of a longer kindergarten day, see a *Report on Full-Day Kindergarten,* published by the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Council (1983). Among the advantages, in addition to those mentioned above, the council cites:

- increased opportunities for children of limited English proficiency to increase fluency in English;

- more time for creative and enriching experiences such as cooking, field trips, art, music, dramatics and physical education;

- increased opportunities for children to develop stronger social relationships with their peers and with adults;
- time to talk about experiences, to solve problems, to engage in critical thinking, to organize ideas and arrive at conclusions;
- a lunch time in which sound nutrition, good eating habits and social skills can be stressed;
- greater opportunity for help and attention to children with disabilities; and
- a more consistent day for the child who otherwise would have been moving from place to place.

Possible disadvantages cited by the council include:

- danger of overemphasizing formal and overly structured academics;
- too long and tiring a day for some children;
- cafeteria or playground situations that are overwhelming for a young child; and
- need for additional personnel, classroom space, materials and equipment that may make the program financially prohibitive.

Not for every child

When the kindergarten day is lengthened, options should be made available for children for whom an extended or full day of school seems too long. Some children may need to attend half-day sessions for part of the year before they are comfortable in a longer day program. However, if the extended/full-day program offers individualized learning experiences in a flexible, well-paced and relaxed setting, the longer day will meet the needs of every child without causing tiredness or fatigue.

If the extended-day program will not be offered to all children within a school, it is wise to consider the philosophy of the program and admit all children as soon as possible. It may also be helpful to contact school districts that were in a similar position initially, to learn about feasible options for the selection of children, such as by lottery, determined need, or equity.

Chapter 7
Building a Home-School-Community Partnership

The roots of the public schools, as Ira J. Gordon (1976) points out, "are deeply tied to the neighborhood, the community and the home."

Parenting relationships take many forms--mother, father, single parent, guardians who may be grandparents, other family members, or individuals who take on the parenting role. Whatever the relationship, today's "parents" have to make many difficult choices about the education of their children. Helping families to make these decisions, with the needs of the individual child in mind, requires a cooperative effort by teachers and administrators.

Learning to use the resources of the home to aid in successful kindergarten instruction is a skill that, when cultivated, can reward both student and teacher with successes that might otherwise be forfeited. Most teacher preparation programs, however, do not focus on the home-school-community partnership. This chapter contains suggestions for ways to bring the resources of the home to the classroom while supporting the capability of the home to sustain and enrich the offerings of the kindergarten.

Parents and teachers have reciprocal responsibilities to each other and to their joint charge, the child. Parents, in fact, are the young child's first teachers and young children need to see their parents and their school agreeing on learning goals. Teachers should feel comfortable in sharing with parents the classroom goals and enlisting parents' help in attaining them, when such participation is within the capability of the family unit. The family may need special assistance in order to carry out home instruction consistent with classroom objectives. But if close contact is maintained, the teacher is less likely to violate the parents' cultural standards. The essence of the home-school partnership is to establish trust and reach a consensus about areas of responsibility and support.

The involvement of the home in the education of children can take many forms and occur on several levels within the school. Some schools have paid staff people who are responsible for community and parent involvement. They seek to bring the resources of the community to benefit the school. Such support, while useful, is less personal than home-school involvement at the classroom level, which can result in direct benefits to the child.

Parent-school communication

Teachers owe each family the privilege of clear communications. Although parents are encouraged to reciprocate, it is the teacher's responsibility to gather information that will enable the classroom to serve the child. A self-examination of one's personal prejudices and one's knowledge of the family's background and circumstances can insure that personal attitudes do not interfere with the teacher's professional obligation.

A teacher's interaction with the home is generally to solicit information or services from or bring services to the family. The teacher's sensitivity to the family's orientation can facilitate or inhibit these communications. Is the family willing to provide or accept assistance? Is the manner in which the service is offered appropriate to or consistent with the family's cultural attitudes? Will the direct approach secure the desired service or will it embarrass the family?

Encouraging parent involvement

When teachers communicate with the home, they demonstrate that they value the role parents play in their children's lives. The following suggestions for encouraging parental involvement are adapted from Gordon and Browne (1985):

- Prepare parents for what they can expect from their child's school experience. As part of kindergarten orientation, review with parents the school policies and yearly calendar.
- Reinforce the pride children naturally feel about their mothers and fathers.
- Know the parents by name and communicate with them regularly. If they bring their children to school, take advantage of the daily contact. Find ways to touch base with those who do not come to school every day.
- Respect parents for the job they do and the roles they play, and for their individuality. Respect their privacy and do not provide one parent with information about another.
- Listen to parents with understanding. Hear them out and try to see their points of view.

Creating good rapport with a child's family not only helps families and children, it also provides the teacher with insights that are essential in responding to each child's individual needs. Examples of suggested techniques are:

- newsletters that give an idea of what the children are doing and special events taking place in class;
- a kindergarten handbook containing information on school policies related to entrance age, size of classes, curriculum, special services, school calendar (including special activities for parents), school insurance, appropriate clothing and toys, and radio stations that announce snow days;
- bulletin boards, where parents can see them, featuring notices about parent meetings, guest speakers, community resources, child care and library story hours;
- a location where parents can meet informally in small groups;
- informal contacts, such as a phone call or note to parents who cannot attend meetings or come to school;
- home visits to meet the family and let members get acquainted with the teacher;
- parent discussion sessions at a time and place when parents can meet to discuss with the teacher and with each other the program and the children's progress;
- "family of the week" recognition on the school bulletin board or in the newsletter;
- guest cards for grandparents, neighborhood senior citizens, town officials and others to visit the school;
- pairing new parents in the community with a "buddy parent," preferably one who speaks their native language, to accompany them to their first school meetings and to introduce them; and
- a welcome packet of information and tour of the school for new families in the community.

Parent-teacher conferences

Parents and teachers need to review and discuss a child's program, how the child is growing, handling materials and functioning in a group, and what he/she enjoys and doesn't like in school.

Gordon and Browne (1985) have the following suggestions for successful parent-teacher conferences:

- Schedule conferences on a regular basis to share positive aspects of a child's development as well as to discuss a crisis.
- Be prepared with materials, notes and samples of the child's work to illustrate the points you wish to make.
- Select a quiet place, free from interruption.
- Have a clear purpose.
- Put parents at ease right away with a cup of coffee or an amusing classroom anecdote.
- Use up-to-date information and data, citing situations that occurred recently.
- Ask, don't tell. Encourage parent input by asking open-ended questions.
- Learn how to listen. Concentrate on what the parents are saying, not on your response.
- Avoid blaming parents. Consider alternatives together and make a plan of action.
- Know where and how to secure community resources and referrals and share the information.

The conference is not over when the parents leave. Teachers should keep careful records of the discussion, suggestions and follow-up activities that have been agreed upon.

Parent roles within the classroom

Parents may be involved directly in the school as paid participants or volunteers. They may serve as tutors, clerical aides, library or lunchroom assistants or in other supportive roles. Emphasis should be placed on balancing roles for working and at-home parents, and sufficient time should be devoted to training for the roles the parents will assume in the instructional program. Before the training workshop, teachers must have clearly in mind how they plan to use aides or volunteers productively. Once in the classroom, parents will require some of the teacher's time and reinforcement in order to succeed.

One final admonition to teachers: never forget to show appreciation and to give recognition--through letters, phone calls, certificates or mention in school and community papers--for a job well done.

Parenting education

Research clearly indicates that children from homes where education is highly valued and who are given positive stimulation to enhance their total development are more successful in school endeavors. It is important, therefore, for schools to accept some responsibility for parenting education as an extension of their role in educating young children.

Many programs have been developed to help parents with child rearing. Often community agencies, such as the YMCA or YWCA, offer programs in addition to workshops and seminars provided by the school system. By becoming familiar with programs offered in the community, teachers and administrators can give parents some guidelines and direction in choosing a program that matches their specific needs.

The partnership among the home, the school and the community must be a strong one if the kindergarten program is to be effective.

Chapter 8
Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten

Increasing numbers of young children today are participating in early childhood programs prior to enrollment in kindergarten. For many young children, the kindergarten teacher is not the "first teacher" and the kindergarten class is not the first group experience, as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services points out in a 1987 publication entitled *Easing the Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten--A Guide for Early Childhood Teachers and Administrators.* The following discussion of the transition is adapted from that document.

Because learning is a continuous process, the transition from preschool to kindergarten is important for all those who educate and care for young children. There are four critical elements or keys to the successful transition of families and young children as they move from preschool to kindergarten. Education staff in both settings can facilitate this transition.

Providing program continuity

The move from preschool to kindergarten is made easier if both programs are focused on individual developmental needs. If both programs are developmentally appropriate, children will be more likely to find similar activities which will allow them to begin their kindergarten experiences confident that they have the ability to accomplish certain tasks. Knowing what is expected adds to children's self-confidence, encourages them to try new activities and facilitates continuity in their development.

As children enter kindergarten, they are more able to develop interests in the community and the world outside their immediate experiences. They show increased ability to use motor skills, to pay attention for longer periods of time, and to play and plan cooperatively. Also they display a growing interest in symbols, including written language and numbers.

Maintaining communication

Administrators in both preschool and kindergarten can set the stage for successful transition activities by supporting ongoing communication and cooperation among early childhood teachers. Preschool and kindergarten staff can increase educational program continuity by sharing information about their programs and planning for an effective transition. Opportunities for communication and cooperation should occur throughout the year so that teachers become comfortable with each other and can discuss their programs openly.

The need for accurate and unbiased information about programs is important. Since preschool teachers may have to interact with several "receiver" schools and kindergarten teachers may have to contact several "feeder" programs, it may be helpful to establish a community-wide transition committee.

Preschool and kindergarten administrators can initiate opportunities for communication and exchange among teachers so that they can plan the transition. For example:

- Teachers can visit each other's classrooms to observe.
- Kindergarten teachers might be asked to sit on the preschool board or preschool teachers might be invited to attend school PTA meetings.
- Preschool administrators can write letters in the spring to receiving public schools, listing the names of incoming children and communicating information about their preschool programs.

- Arrangements can be made between preschool and kindergarten staff to provide special assistance for non-English-speaking parents whose children are moving to a new program.

- Preschool staff can discuss the transfer of records to the school. Some programs, such as Head Start or programs serving children with special needs, may already have specific arrangements for the transfer of records. The most important concern is to accord parents their full rights of privacy regarding their children's records.

Preparing children for transition

Despite the variety of previous experiences, all children need to be accepted at their own developmental level. Preparing children for the transition to kindergarten does not mean "getting them ready" by focusing on a narrow range of academic skills or retaining them in preschool for another year. School is where children and parents expect to find opportunities for growth and development from whatever starting point the child brings to the new setting. (Nebraska Department of Education, 1984)

Children need to know what is expected of them in the new program and to have opportunities to become familiar with the new environment. Transition activities can include discussion, stories, games, dramatic play and field trips.

Involving parents

A joint effort by school and home is needed to effect a smooth transition. For the parent, the preschool may be a familiar family support system where there has been frequent contact with the staff. Kindergarten may represent a less familiar environment with a different type of program for children and families.

Many parents are actively involved in their children's preschool program. They should be encouraged to continue their involvement and to convey a positive attitude about the new school.

Parents also need support to work through the effect on their daily lives of changing programs. For example, locating child care that can be used in conjunction with the kindergarten may be a critical need for families with children in both programs.

Issues of kindergarten entry and placement

The following recommendations are quoted, with permission, from a position statement of the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education entitled *Unacceptable Trends--Kindergarten Entry and Placement.* NAECS/SDE calls for policy makers, educators and all concerned about young children to use the following principles for kindergarten entry and placement:

> "KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS GUARD THE INTEGRITY OF EFFECTIVE, DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN. THEY DO NOT YIELD TO PRESSURE FOR ACCELERATION OF NARROWLY FOCUSED, SKILL-BASED CURRICULA.
>
> "CHILDREN ARE ENROLLED IN KINDERGARTEN BASED ON THEIR LEGAL RIGHT TO ENTER. FAMILIES ARE NOT COUNSELED OR PRESSURED TO DELAY ENTRANCE OF THEIR CHILDREN FOR A YEAR BY KEEPING THEM AT HOME OR ENROLLING THEM IN PRESCHOOL.
>
> "KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS ARE INFORMED ABOUT MEASUREMENT STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES AND ARE INVOLVED

RESPONSIBLY IN THEIR USE. THEY DO NOT DEFER MEASUREMENT DECISIONS SOLELY TO PSYCHOMETRICIANS AND TEST PUBLISHERS.

"ANY TESTS USED AT KINDERGARTEN ENTRANCE ARE VALID, RELIABLE, AND HELPFUL IN INITIAL PROGRAM PLANNING AND INFORMATION-SHARING WITH PARENTS. THEY ARE NOT USED TO CREATE BARRIERS TO SCHOOL ENTRY OR TO SORT CHILDREN INTO WHAT ARE PERCEIVED TO BE HOMOGENEOUS GROUPS.

"RETENTION IS REJECTED AS A VIABLE OPTION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN. IT IS NOT PERPETUATED ON THE BASIS OF FALSE ASSUMPTIONS AS TO ITS EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT.

"ALL CHILDREN ARE WELCOMED--AS THEY ARE--INTO HETEROGENEOUS KINDERGARTEN SETTINGS. THEY ARE NOT SEGREGATED INTO EXTRA-YEAR PROGRAMS PRIOR TO OR FOLLOWING REGULAR KINDERGARTEN."

The rationale for each of the principles espoused by NAECS appears in the complete guide to kindergarten programs, part 1.

Kindergarten entry process

School systems have developed a vast array of entry procedures to assist in locating and registering kindergarten-eligible children and in introducing them and their families to the school and the kindergarten program. Local policies should be reviewed periodically to ensure that modifications will be made which best meet the needs of children.

For a checklist of components of the entry process and descriptions of each step involved, see *Kindergarten Entry Policies In Your Community--a Self-Evaluation Checklist* by Marilyn Schaffer and Claudia Shuster (CT Early Childhood Education Council, 1982).

Connecticut General Statutes relating to kindergarten entry are:

- **Sec. 10-15** requiring that kindergartens be maintained for at least 180 days of actual school sessions during each year;
- **Sec. 10-15c** requiring that public schools be open to all children five years of age and over and that each child shall have an equal opportunity to participate in the activities;
- **Sec. 10-16** defining a school day for nursery schools and kindergartens as a continuous session of two and one-half hours.

Screening and assessment for entrance to kindergarten is a controversial topic among educators. Developmental screening takes place much earlier than kindergarten registration, since the school is responsible for identifying preschoolers with disabilities from birth and providing programs to serve their needs at age three. Therefore, developmental screening instruments, if they are used with children registering for kindergarten, should offer brief procedures to identify children who may need more intensive diagnostic assessment; sample the domain of developmental tasks rather than specific academic readiness; and focus on a wide range of skills--speech, language, cognition, perception, affect, gross and fine motor skills. Careful consideration must be given to the selection of a developmental screening instrument to assure that it is sensitive and normed to the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children to whom it is administered. Developmental screening should not be used to label children, determine placement in specific programs or classrooms, or be used to "counsel out" age-eligible children from school entry.

Many school districts also use readiness testing in the kindergarten entry process. Readiness testing focuses on those skills that a child has acquired, not on the child's potential for learning, which is a more reliable predictor of school success. A child's performance on a single test,

administered in the spring of the year prior to kindergarten entry, under unfamiliar conditions, may not be an accurate measure of the child's level of functioning. Also, it does not take into account the growth that may take place during the summer.

Informal processes, such as observations and anecdotal records of family and caregivers, are widely recognized as a source of significant information and should be given primary consideration. When developmental screening alerts the examiners that children are at risk or have handicapping conditions, diagnostic assessment should follow promptly to identify those children who need and are eligible for special education services.

In order for a school district to plan for the next school year, it is necessary to gather data in the spring. Hearing and vision screening, the planning of bus routes and assignments of classrooms and teachers, and provision of information to parents can take place prior to kindergarten entry. In the fall, gradual entry is encouraged, with children divided into small groups and each group coming to school on specified, separate days, during the first week or two.

Ongoing evaluation

The teacher's ability to observe, evaluate and record the behavior and growth of children is of great importance in determining and meeting individual needs. Examples of questions that will help to guide the evaluation process include:

- Is information being gathered and recorded in a systematic way?
- Do procedures include observation, teacher-child conferences, parents, resource teachers, work samples and child-made records?
- Are there procedures for communicating objective information about children's accomplishments to their parents?
- Are the results of observation and recording being used to improve and individualize instruction?

Teacher observation and record keeping

Care must be taken to record observations in clear, descriptive language and to differentiate between observed behavior and its interpretations. Observations can be used to share examples of children's growth with parents or to indicate areas of need which require joint support from parents and teacher.

Record keeping related to curriculum will include the knowledge and skills that the child has mastered and notes about such progress. Social and emotional observations are best noted with anecdotal records which include dates of specific behaviors.

Videotaping activities, tape recording conversations and photographing children's work are valuable. Samples of student work from the beginning, middle and end of the year allow for growth comparisons.

Child-created records--checking their names on a learning center roster or placing a peg in a board to indicate work in a center--are another source of assessment. Teacher-child conferences may yield anecdotal records. Information from resource personnel and parents provide other points of view.

After kindergarten

As the school year comes to a close, attention turns to planning for each child's continuing experience in the next year. Classroom placements should be consistent with children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. Children should be placed with teachers who are sensitive to their individual needs and in a class where they will do their best. This may be a multi-age class, an ungraded primary or a one-grade-level setting.

Developmentally appropriate programs in the primary grades form a continuum of learning. In order to provide program continuity, communication and cooperative planning between the kindergarten and first grade teachers and the elementary principal are fundamental. All need to accept the fact that children will be entering first grade with varied experiences and skills and that expectations should be flexible about when and how children will acquire certain competencies. Just as remedial services can be provided for children within a regular grade-level classroom, so can the needs of immature, young children be served by some extra attention within the context of the regular classroom setting.

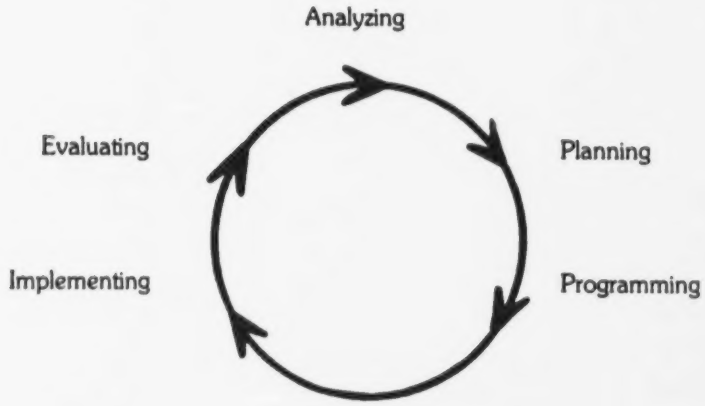
This point of view is articulated n the position statement on kindergarten adopted by the Nebraska State Board of Education (1984): "When a sound kindergarten program is followed by an equally sound elementary school program, remedial problems can be lessened, retentions can disappear and enthusiastic students can result. Let's try to insure that all children have this opportunity."

Chapter 9
Program Planning and Evaluation

The preceding chapters describe the characteristics, components and resources recommended for a high quality kindergarten program. But how does a community plan for such a program in its local school?

Some districts will want to undertake extensive examination of their present kindergarten program while others may simply seek ways to strengthen an existing program that already features the basic components suggested in this guide.

Planning, of course, actually begins and ends with evaluation; the process is circular. Planning for the kindergarten program should be part of each district's overall curriculum planning process, reflecting the district's particular philosophy, goals and objectives.



Source: State Department of Education, *A Guide to Curriculum Development: Purposes, Practices and Procedures*, 1981, page 15.

The responsibility for kindergarten planning should be assigned to a committee that represents all important constituencies:

- administrators, including one or more elementary principals;
- kindergarten and primary teachers and paraprofessionals;
- representatives of local public and private preschools and day-care centers (including parents, teachers and administrators);
- subject area curriculum directors and other school professionals; and, most important,
- parents.

Not only can each of these individuals contribute expertise and insight to the committee's deliberations, but broad-based representation in program planning is an effective means of

building consensus. Consensus is necessary to generate support for the program and to build a continuum of developmentally appropriate experiences from prekindergarten through the primary grades and beyond.

The charge to the committee should be clearly stated and one person should be designated to head the group. Endorsement from the local board of education will underscore the significance of the undertaking and lend credibility. Initial support also facilitates implementation of any recommendations that result.

Planning models

A helpful source for thoughts on curriculum development is the State Department of Education's *Guide to Curriculum Development: Purposes, Practices and Procedures* (1981). The guide notes four questions central to planning posed by curriculum expert Ralph Tyler and applicable to kindergarten program planning:

- What educational purposes should the kindergarten program serve?
- What educational experiences are likely to achieve the stated purposes?
- How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
- How can we determine whether or not these purposes are being attained?

Analysis

The analysis phase of the planning cycle is essential. Questionnaires are often used to gather opinions; interviews may also be used. Ideally, the opinions of all constituencies represented on the committee should be solicited. Initial consensus about desired program outcomes should not be expected. Opposing ideas about any number of issues--length of kindergarten day or type of program--may surface and must be resolved. In most cases of disagreement, early childhood educators will need to take the lead in generating understanding and support for program outcomes that are based on current understanding of child development and on research in the field.

Planning

Based on the information gathered in the analysis and on the expertise of the committee, a philosophy and goals and objectives for the district's kindergarten program can be developed. The philosophy statement should be clear and preferably written. From it, consistent goals, objectives and learning experiences--key elements in program planning--can be formulated.

Goals are broad statements of program outcomes. Goals for the kind of kindergarten advocated in this guide might include:

- to help children develop a positive self-concept;
- to expand children' s concepts and ideas about the world;
- to help children express themselves in many ways;
- to help children develop curiosity and love of learning.

Objectives are more specific than goals. Good objectives will emphasize growth and development, will cover all four developmental areas--intellectual, physical, social and emotional--and will reflect the individual developmental differences among children of kindergarten age. Charts in Chapter 2 of *A Guide to Program Development for Kindergarten* describe the parameters of these developmental areas.

Programming and Implementation

With philosophy, goals and objectives agreed upon, it is possible to determine the learning experiences, instructional strategies and materials appropriate for the kind of kindergarten program desired. Precise definition of learning experiences--what children will do--translates philosophy, goals and objectives into classroom practices. Chapters 3 and 5 provide information on instructional strategies and materials, and Part 2 of the guide presents sample curricula.

Assessing need and allocating resources. Implementing a new or modified kindergarten program requires identifying and allocating the necessary resources to achieve the desired outcomes. When it is impossible to provide all the new resources immediately--not an uncommon problem--it is important to assign priorities carefully for adding resources. When significant program modifications are planned--if, for example, the kindergarten day is to be extended--the need to insure that the necessary resources are available is particularly important.

Program evaluation

This step involves collecting and analyzing information to determine whether or not a program is achieving its goals and objectives. Before a newly defined program is implemented, it is necessary to consider how the program will be evaluated. The following characteristics of good evaluation should be kept in mind:

- Select who/what will be evaluated, how often and under what circumstances.
- Have a clear purpose; define the expected outcomes.
- Decide how the data will be collected and who will be responsible.
- Define what will be done with the results: to whom they will be reported and what actions will be taken.

Evaluation of one component of the program--reading readiness, for example--does not constitute program evaluation.

Different assumptions will lead to different types of evaluations. Most current curriculum evaluation, according to Vincent Rogers, professor of education at the University of Connecticut, operates largely on "conventional research." There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but it places great reliance on the use of words, on paper and pencil answers, and on test scores and grades.

If, for example, one evaluates on the conventional assumption that linguistic modes of learning and expression are the only modes of learning worth evaluating, the resulting conclusion will be quite different than if one assumes that auditory and visual modes of reacting to phenomena also have value as ways of learning. Or if one relies only on paper and pencil responses to questions, the evaluation of a program's effectiveness may be very different from one based on face-to-face contact and observations.

A basic function of program evaluation is to gather a comprehensive description of children and programs. Samples of children's work, excerpts from teachers' journals, comments of observers and other descriptive information will help parents and teachers decide on the effectiveness of the school's programs, methods and activities.

This type of qualitative evaluation is particularly suited to the kind of kindergarten programming advocated in *A Guide to Program Development for Kindergarten.*

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